

Asian Diplomacy . . .

U.S. Took Prattfall in Viet-Nam

By Murrey Marder

THE United States, with all its world might, dignity and prestige, has taken a public pratfall on the streets of Saigon.

It did so because it was using the equivalent power of an atomic howitzer against factions that were armed, relatively, with sharpened bamboo



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sticks. The late John Foster Dulles, who learned some lessons about the uselessness of massively disproportionate force, once described this reverse use of power as "the tyranny of the weak."

Not only did the United States fail to work its will this week to lead, induce or pressure the controllers of power in South Viet-Nam to support a Western-style, civilian-based government.

But now, that blow to U.S. prestige is being invoked by anti-American cliques in South Viet-Nam to try to treat the elephantine United States as a hostage of the South Vietnamese mouse. To add insult to injury, the Communist propaganda line, which logically should have been upended by the turn of events, is now pouring its scorn on the United States.

FOR YEARS the Communists have pounded at the United States with charges that the leaders of South Viet-Nam are only the "lackeys" and "puppets" of Washington. Events in South Viet-Nam this week showed just the reverse.

But instead of abandoning the "lackey" and "puppet" line, Peking, Hanoi and Moscow have chortlingly intensified it.

Illogical? Yes. But not surprising. Propaganda is not necessarily confined to logical lines.

If the South Vietnamese leaders are "puppets," why did they not respond to Washington's orders? Only because, snicker the Communist propagandists, Washington did such a muddled job of pulling the strings.

UNLIKE the Communists in a similar situation, the United States in Viet-Nam is impaled by Western standards, Western mores and Western legal concepts. It has tried to adapt them to an oriental framework, with frustrating results.

The United States has bent and strained its standards considerably to try to bridge that East-West gap, only to topple into the crevasse.

Its military "advisers," now numbering 23,000, obviously are performing in more than an advisory capacity; many are being killed in front-line combat. Yet politically, Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh, the current strongman in South Viet-Nam, brusquely has demonstrated that the United States does have only an "advisory" role in South Viet-Nam, and that advice can be coldly rejected.

But if the United States really has only an advisory position in South Viet-Nam, then it is surely grossly over-represented, apart from its vast military and economic commitment.

In an embryonic nation of 14 million people, the United States has on the scene numerous generals, plus two men of first-class ambassadorial rank. Moreover, one of them, Maxwell D. Taylor, recently held the prestigious post of Chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff.

With this array of brass, it is inevitable that any local snub or show of ruffled feelings—that is endemic in a place like South Viet-Nam—immediately will rebound disproportionately against the prestige of the United States. That has now happened, clangingly.

IF THE United States did have only an advisory function in Viet-Nam, then it could simply pull out its advisory mission when its advice is spurned, as it has often done elsewhere in the world.

But the United States commitment to halt the onrush of communism in South Viet-Nam is far too deep for that.

Instead, the United States ignominiously is forced to continue its great supply of men and money, while the South Vietnamese generals and Buddhists negotiate among themselves by oriental standards on who will govern the confused nation, and whether and how the anti-Communist struggle will continue. To the frustrated men assigned to carry out existing American policy, there is no other course—short of a new policy.